

National Geographic and NOAA's Channel Islands Marine Sanctuary Field Study
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Pristine beaches, rugged mountains and lonely canyons are but a few of the precious resources found on Santa Cruz Island, destination for the National Geographic and NOAA's Channel Islands Marine Sanctuary Field Study. This California "Island in the Sea" is a unique national treasure, protected by the National Park and National Marine Sanctuary systems, managed in part by The Nature Conservancy and the focus of research by the University of California's Reserve System, among many others.

Twelve student/teacher pairs were selected from primarily urban, underserved areas in Maine, Oregon, Hawaii, Connecticut, Virginia and California, as part of a rare 4-day expedition to study and photograph the geology, flora, and fauna of Santa Cruz Island and surrounding national marine sanctuary. Their journey began aboard the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary *R/V Shearwater* transporting participants from California's urban coastline to this one hundred square mile island, an environmental oasis.



Photo by Alex Slack.



Photo by Ben Brandes.

Activities over the next three days ranged from formal lectures, kayaking around the island's famous sea caves, firsthand exploration of the island's unique ecology, sandy beach monitoring, to hiking in the California sun. Evening presentations highlighted expert presentations on: endemic species only found on Santa Cruz, Crittercam footage that captured life from the animals point of view and an introduction to photography for a "Youth Media" project, led by photographer Susanna Frohman. Armed with a new skill to study this special place, students took over 1700 photographs using digital cameras donated by Nikon to document this once in a life-time experience of remote island life.

Participants were also able to explore the cultural side of the island by visiting historic buildings on this former ranch. Adobe ranch houses and the Island's chapel date back to the 1800's, to a different moment in time forever captured through these buildings. Prior to its ranching days, the island was also home to the Chumash Indians. University of California - Santa Barbara reserve manager and island expert Lyndall Laughrin told stories of the nearly 2,000 native Americans that once lived here.

A long, dusty truck ride, the island's only transportation, brought participants to Christy's Beach on the west side of the island. The beach became an outdoor classroom where students and teachers were introduced to the habitat for sand crabs, soaring sea birds and other intertidal creatures. The following day brought one of the trip's highlights, a kayak tour of the marine

sanctuary with glimpses of playful sea lions, orange flashes of Garibaldi, California's State fish, as well as some of the 150 bird species that make Santa Cruz island their home.

A hike between Pelican Bay and Prisoner's Harbor gave participants breathtaking views of unspoiled coastlines, as well as the opportunity to snap more pictures and spot evidence of the island's inhabitants such as the treasured island foxes and the non-native feral pigs that threaten the island's environment. These activities gave students and teachers alike a chance not only to experience this exceptional environment, but also to learn while they were having a great deal of fun. Student Sadee Brown from Oregon listed the things she liked best from this trip: "The kayaking, because we got to see fish; the hiking because of the views; the boat ride because of being able to see sea lions."



Photo by Susanna Frohman.

The trip came to a close on Thursday morning as everyone gathered to watch the culmination of the Youth Media project. Almost 100 student photographs were chosen, the best of the best, to create a slide show titled "*An Island in the Sea: A Visual Journey*." This project incorporated breathtaking pictures taken by the students through out the expedition and would serve as the ultimate souvenir of their experience to share with others when they returned home.

Participants returned to the mainland and took with them many lessons learned about Santa Cruz Island, the National Park and National Marine Sanctuary. They were also armed with a new way to share their experience through their captured images and an enhanced awareness of the need for continued protection of this unique environment. The memories of meeting new friends, splashing in the ocean, making s'mores by a crackling fire, and sleeping to a chorus of crickets were also tucked away carefully to last a lifetime.

Student Alex Slack from Maine captured the essence of this project when he wrote, "The things that I am going to remember most are the kayaking adventure, the sand crabs (because I had never seen them before) and the Youth Media Project because it personally showed me the beauty of the island."

The Channel Islands Field Study Program is an "Oceans for Life" student/teacher education project sponsored by the National Geographic Society and NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Program. The project was conducted at the University of California Natural Reserve System, Santa Cruz Island Preserve, University of California, Santa Barbara. The Reserve is protected and managed by the Nature Conservancy. This project also represented a collaborative effort between the project sponsors and the following institutions who are gratefully acknowledged for their assistance: The University of Southern California Sea Grant, The Channel Islands National Park, The Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary, The Center for Image Processing in Education and Ocean Futures. Nikon is also thanked for their donation of digital cameras making the Youth Media project possible.

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